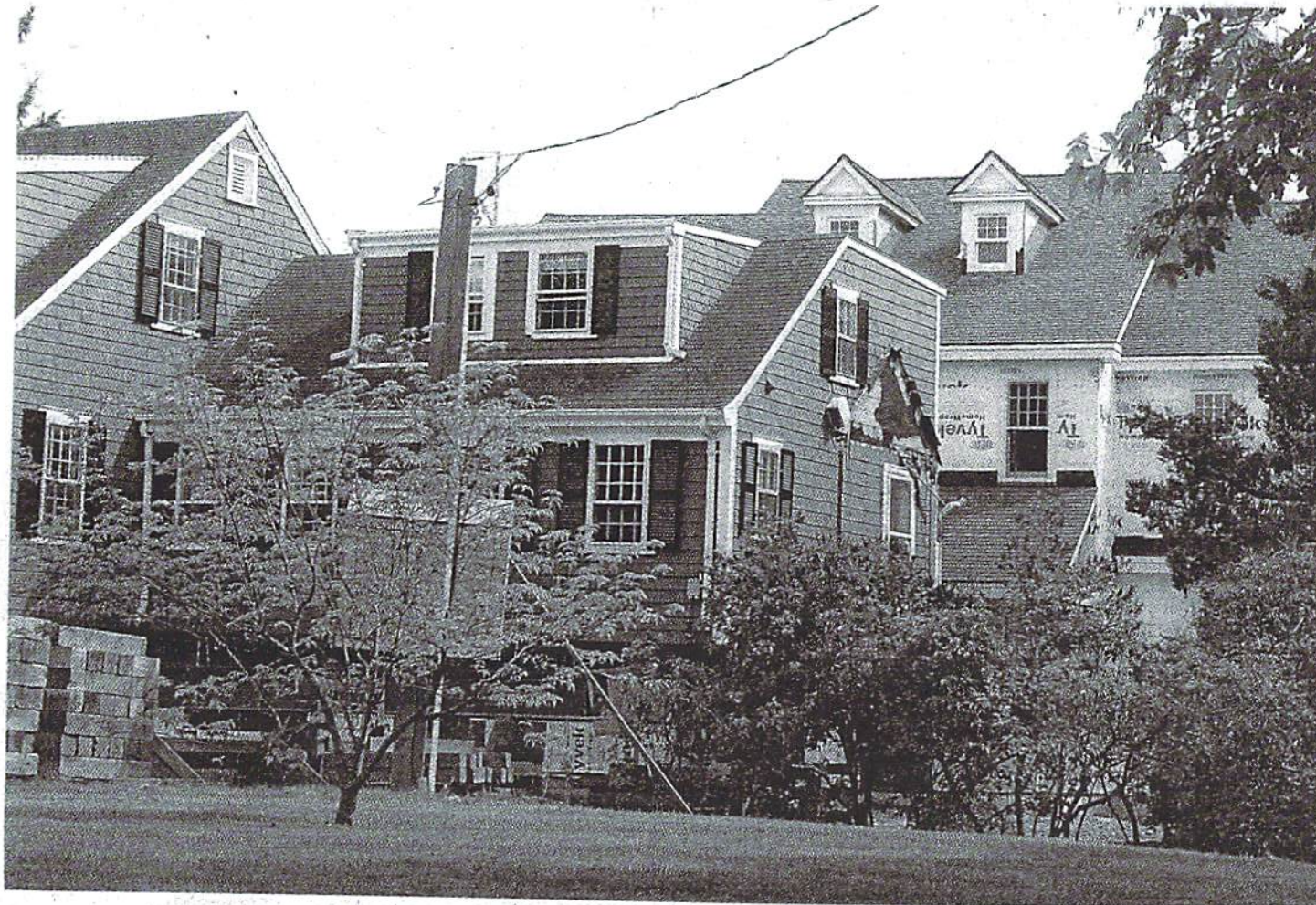


DESCRIPTION



The original house on this Duxbury property sits on blocks in foreground, while a bigger, more modern one rises behind it.

GLOBE STAFF PHOTOS/EVAN RICHMAN

Old charm trumped by modern convenience
as bulldozers remake million-dollar properties

Demolition Duxbury

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By Naomi Aoki
GLOBE STAFF

On a strip of land that juts out into Duxbury Bay, an area known in this seaside town as Powder Point, a modest blue Cape sits on stilts, waiting to be taken away. Behind it looms the much larger house being built to take its place.

Down the road, a large yellow house with a three-car garage rises into view where a small cottage once stood. On another nearby property, a Cape was torn down after it was bought for \$1.5 million three years ago to make way for a house roughly four times its size.

So-called "teardowns" are reshaping the character of Duxbury's neighborhoods. From Bay Road to Powder Point, people are buying properties for as much as \$4.7 million only to tear down the

existing homes and replace them with far grander dwellings.

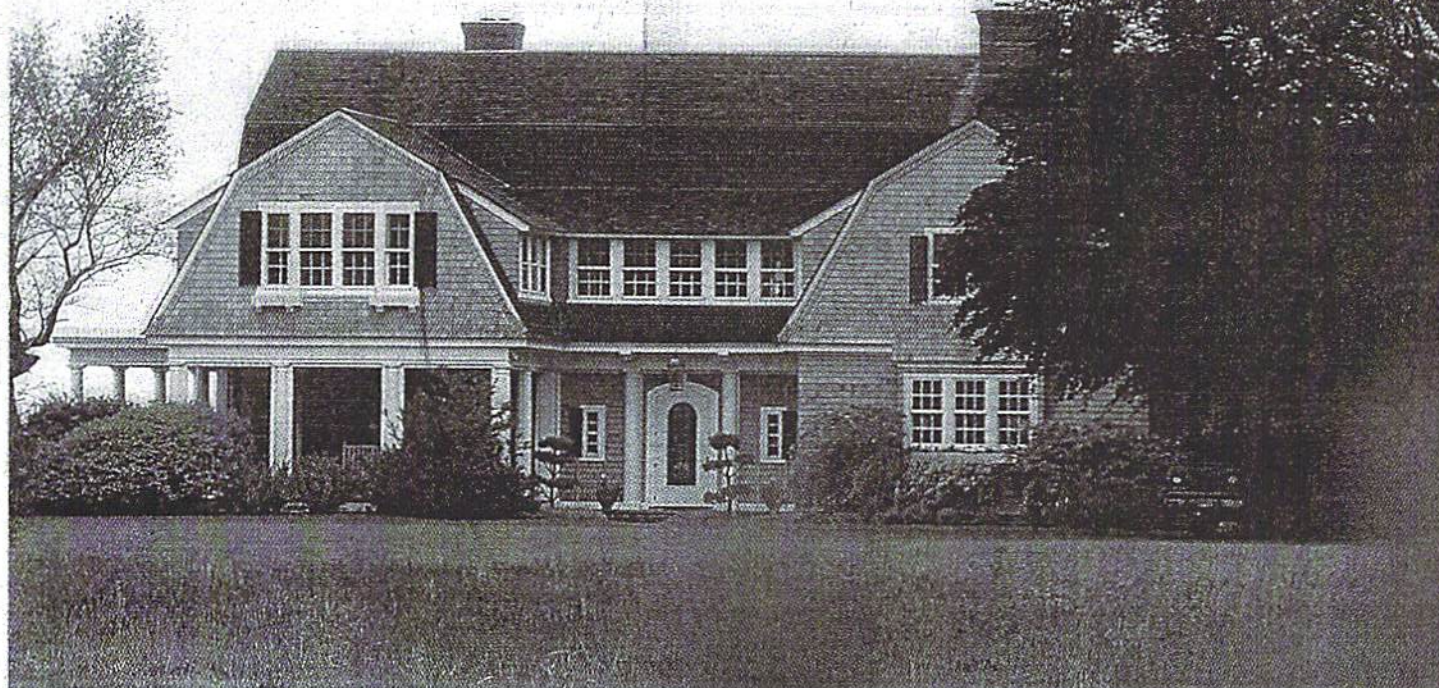
The process is not new. Home demolitions, a rarity as recently as a decade ago, are now being seen in almost every suburban community in Greater Boston, and have nearly quadrupled since the late 1990s in some affluent suburbs, such as Lexington and Needham, where older homes no longer measure up to local property values. And the situation is intensified among communities along the ocean, as land with water views quickly outvalues the buildings on it. (A Duxbury home that sold for less than \$400,000 a decade ago is now on the market for \$3.5 million.)

But in Duxbury, which for many is defined by its charm and understated affluence, the new

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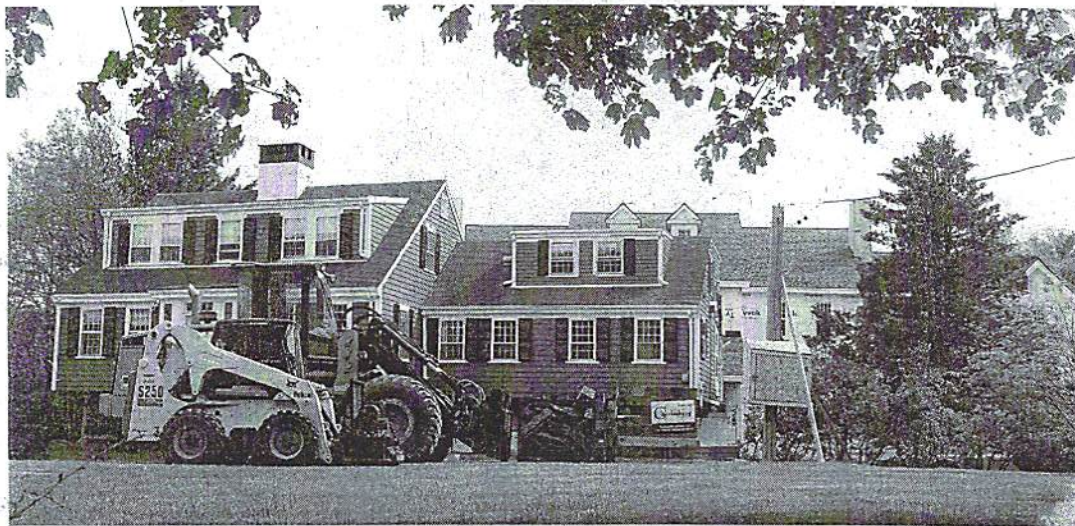


Resident Jeanne Clark is working to preserve historic houses.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/TOM HERDE

A house on Powder Point Avenue offers an example of Duxbury's tradition of charm and understated affluence.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/EVAN RICHMAN

Work continues on a new Duxbury house, visible behind the original it is replacing.

Modern homes replace old charm

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replacement homes — even when done well, as many are — raise questions of style and economics.

"For years, this was a sleepy historic seaside community," said Brian Cook, a lawyer specializing in zoning issues in this town of roughly 14,250. "People who lived here for the past 100 years bought homes and kept them the way they were. The community maintained its flavor because that's what it wanted. These newer homes that are bigger and more ornate tend to shake people's view of what the town is."

On a tiny road leading down to the water, a rambling bungalow crafted of redwood is tucked in among tiny old cottages. On Winsor Street, a brick mansion that looks as if it were plucked off the Uni-

down small ranches and Capes in affluent suburbs continues at the current rate, the structural remains of post World War II suburban life will disappear.

Settled by Pilgrims, including Myles Standish, John Alden, and William Brewster, venturing out from Plymouth, Duxbury was primarily a farming community through the 18th century.

By the 1840s, however, the town had become the largest producer of sailing vessels on the South Shore, with about 20 shipyards, and averaged 10 vessels every year between 1790 and 1830. When its shipbuilding era passed, Duxbury entered a long economic decline.

By the late 19th century, its rural character and unspoiled bay had begun attracting summer residents and tourists, and Duxbury is rife with summer

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All this in a town where even the showcase historic homes, once occupied by captains of the ship-building industry, are relatively simple and unassuming.

"I wish that people who find these towns charming better understood what generates that charm," noted Jeanne Clark, a longtime resident who was instrumental in getting a demolition-delay bylaw passed several years ago to help preserve the town's historic homes.

Another concern involves the economic ripple effect of teardowns. Home demolition can be reducing a community's stock of affordable housing, creating more barriers to young families or senior citizens without deep pockets, even as the state is working to increase the supply. In 2003, the median sales price of a single-family home in Duxbury was \$462,500, an increase of more than 126 percent over the past decade. Less than 4 percent of the town's housing stock qualifies as affordable, a far cry from the state's minimum goal of 10 percent.

"You're sitting on a gold mine but it's your home and if you sell it, you can't stay in the same town because there is a diminishing inventory of smaller houses," said Clark, who has lived with her husband in the same house on Surplus Street since 1955.

Defenders of teardowns point out that many of the homes being demolished have fallen into disrepair, or lack modern-day needs, such as large family rooms, convenient kitchens, and multiple bathrooms. And a good number of the modern replacements are tasteful, attractive houses that raise the neighborhood's property values.

Yet planners warn that if the practice of tearing

downs that followed. Half Capes, designed for married couples with the expectation they would build the other half when children arrived, remain as a testament to a less affluent era.

But as skyrocketing real estate prices spread south to Duxbury in recent years, newcomers weren't interested in paying upwards of \$1 million to live in a small home. Since 2001, 74 homes have been demolished, according to town records. If a house is more than 75 years old, the local ordinance triggers a six-month delay to evaluate its historic value.

Zoning laws require certain setbacks, and limit the amount of a property that can be covered by a house. And if the property doesn't conform to existing zoning regulations (as is the case with much of the town's housing stock), then renovations and other proposed changes must be approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals. But once the necessary regulations are met, there is little the town can do to stop teardowns.

Some argue that it is simply the march of progress.

With a few notable exceptions, said Doug Friesen, an architectural designer in town, the homes that have been torn down haven't been worth saving. And, he said, most of the "McMansions" in town are part of new developments, rather than existing neighborhoods.

"I'm conservation minded," Friesen said. "But if you look at the charm being lost in this town, far more is being lost to developers buying stretch of woods and building another seven or eight generic Colonials. In almost every case when someone has torn down a house, a nicer-looking house has gone up."